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## **NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Date: July 14, 2020

# **Health Officials see an increase in COVID-19 cases contracted in public areas**

SOUTH CENTRAL IDAHO –South Central Public Health District (SCPHD) is reporting record numbers of cases within several of our region’s counties. The majority of these cases come from people infected with COVID-19 in public areas.

“We are seeing a growing number of people exposed to COVID-19 because they are taking unnecessary risks,” said Tanis Maxwell, SCPHD Epidemiologist. “It doesn’t take much to protect yourself from this disease. Handwashing multiple times a day, keeping six feet between yourself and people outside your household, wearing a mask in public places, and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces: these simple steps can go a long way in preventing the spread of COVID-19.”

Below, two graphs show our region’s counties with the highest recent case rates. Graph 1 shows the test date for confirmed cases, which helps determine when the disease was caught by a medical professional and the person infected was isolated. Graph 2 shows the week people with confirmed or probable cases reported noticing their symptoms begin. This graph is useful in showing a better picture of when a person was likely infected with COVID-19, but can be delayed by up to two weeks depending on when each person was tested. **Both graphs show a large increase in case count compared to any other point in this pandemic so far.**

Currently, seven of the region’s eight counties have confirmed community spread including: Twin Falls, Blaine, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, and Minidoka counties. This means at least one person has contracted the disease in each of those counties without coming into contact with someone they know tested positive. **Health Officials urge residents to take precautions and remember that in counties with community spread the virus may be spreading from people who aren’t showing symptoms or from people with mild symptoms they attribute to something else.**

“We urge you to stay vigilant. You, more than anyone else, have the power to protect your health,” said Maxwell. “If the people around you are putting your health at risk go somewhere else or respectfully ask them to help you protect the community.”

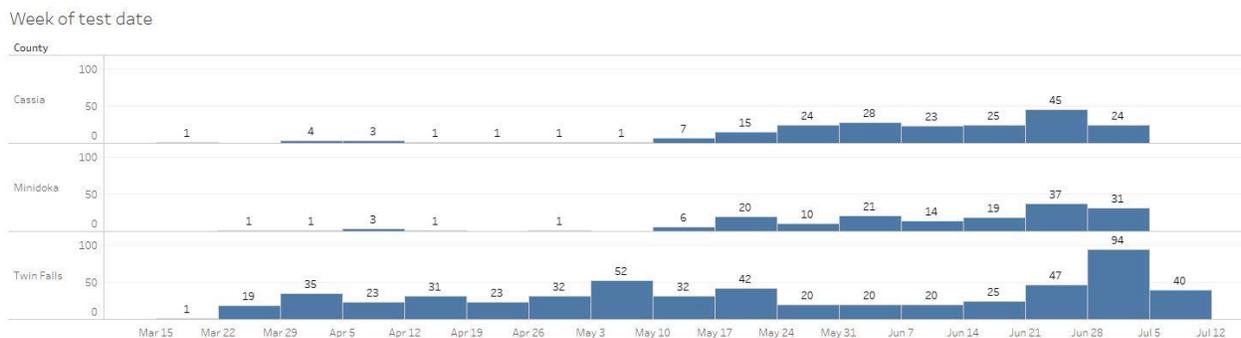
**Many people are reached 1-2 days after their test results are reported to the district, however, recent surges have overburdened health district investigators and delayed some of these investigations. When positive cases surge drastically, contact-tracing can become back-logged. SCPHD urges residents to reach out to their close contacts as soon as they suspect COVID-19 and especially if they have a confirmed case.**

“We continue to add contact tracers to our workforce, but it takes time to train and prepare new staff to handle the sensitive data we work with. We need our residents to help us limit the spread of this disease by making responsible decisions to protect their own health,” said Melody Bowyer, SCPHD District Director. “Public health continues to educate and track this disease, but we need our residents to follow our guidance to actually slow the disease spread.”

SCPHD is also running two hotlines for information about COVID-19. One in Spanish, at (208) 737-5965, and one in English at (208) 737-1138. These hotlines are currently running from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Please refer to <https://phd5.idaho.gov/coronavirus> for the latest local numbers, guidance, and resources. Refer to <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/> for Idaho-specific information and guidance.

Graph 1:



Graph 2:

Onset of symptoms

